

**ARE YOU BURNT OUT?**

*Instructions: Answer "yes" or "no" to the following by checking the appropriate column.*

**SECTION I**

	YES	NO
1. You are more tired lately		
2. You are more irritable and less patient		
3. Recently you want to spend more time by yourself		
4. You are spending more time in escapist activities (watching TV, light reading such as Harlequin romances, mysteries and science fiction)		
5. You feel restless and find it difficult to concentrate without your mind wandering		
6. You find it increasingly difficult to make decisions		
7. You worry about little things		
8. You are aware of an increase in minor illnesses (colds, flu)		
9. You have allergy flare-ups or an increase in the frequency of headaches		
10. Your mood swings more to the negative and you find you focus more on the problems than on the positives		
11. Your memory is deteriorating (forgetting commitments, appointments, valuables)		
12. You work harder and accomplish less		
13. You procrastinate doing work that is important		
14. You feel bored		
15. You don't look forward to doing anything		
16. You think about your job during off hours		
17. You have an increased tendency to move about without purpose. It's hard for you to sit still		
<b>TOTAL</b>		

SECTION II

	YES	NO
1. Your willpower has decreased and as a result, you indulge in your pet vice (nail biting, over-eating, over-smoking, gambling, popping pills)		
2. Your sex drive has decreased		
3. You lose control of your emotions more easily (temper tantrums, crying spells, hysterical laughing)		
4. You distance yourself from your clients or people with whom you work		
5. You process your work according to policy and procedure and lack innovation and spontaneity		
6. You do the minimal amount of work necessary		
7. You blame others for your mistakes and failures		
8. Your physical appearance is sloppy and dishevelled. You take less time dressing and grooming yourself		
9. You get a chronic illness (diabetes, ulcers, high blood pressure, back problems, colitis, migraines)		
10. You are constantly tired		
11. You sleep more than you used to or you are having problems sleeping		
12. You seriously question the worth of your efforts		
13. You seriously consider leaving the situation which is seen as causing your problems		
14. You take "mental health days" off work frequently (increased absenteeism, lateness)		
15. You think you can do the job better than anyone else		
16. You think other people are not pulling their weight		
17. You believe others don't appreciate you and that everyone is watching to see you fail		
<b>TOTAL</b>		



## **BURNOUT**

### A. **DEFINITIONS**

#### **Stress**

Is a negative feature of the work environment that impinges on the individual while Burnout is a psychological strain resulting from the stress of human service work

#### **Burnout**

Is now referred to as Burnout Stress Syndrome. It is an ongoing process, it is multidimensional and there is a developmental sequence of stages to it.

- : a loss of concern for the people with whom one is working
- : a psychological withdrawal from work in response to excessive stress or dissatisfaction
- : rigid and cynical attitudes which are resistant to new programmes and concepts
- : a progressive loss of energy and idealism
- : the loss of motivation for creative involvement
- : the degree to which a co-worker expresses estrangement from clients, colleagues and agency
- : negative self concept, negative job attitude and loss of concern and feelings for clients
- : feelings of loneliness, isolation and helplessness

Burnout has 3 components to it

- a) emotional and/or physical exhaustion
- b) lowered job productivity
- c) overdepersonalisation

Burnout

- 1) occurs at an individual, group and organisational level
- 2) it is an internal psychological experience involving feelings, attitudes, motive and expectations
- 3) the experience is negative for the individual in that it concerns a loss of energy and is associated with problems, distress, dysfunction and/or negative consequences.

#### **Organisational Climate**

Is a characteristic of organisations which is reflected in the descriptions employees make concerning the policies, practices and conditions that exist in the work environment. Organisational climate is related to job satisfaction, job performance, leadership behaviours, the quality of work group interaction and burnout. The ways in which organisations function have identifiable ramifications for the mental health of employees at many levels.

Stresses associated with organisational climate include:

- job design
- leadership
- relationships with co-workers
- a lack of organisational support
- inadequate information

These in turn determine the amount of job satisfaction, alienation, job performance and turnover.

**B. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT:**

Intra-psychoic (Individual)

- high resistance to going to work each day
- a sense of failure
- anger and resentment
- guilt and blame
- discouragement and indifference
- negativism
- isolation and withdrawal
- feeling tired and exhausted all day
- frequent clock watching
- exhaustion after work
- loss of positive feelings towards clients
- postponing client contacts, resisting phone calls
- stereotyping clients
- inability to concentrate or listen to what client is saying
- feeling immobilised
- cynicism regarding clients, a blaming attitude
- sleep disorders
- self preoccupation
- frequent colds and flus
- frequent headaches and gastro-intestinal disturbances
- excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol
- rigidity in thinking
- suspicion and paranoia
- marital and family conflict
- job dissatisfaction
- apathy and disinterest
- feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- loss of idealism, energy and purpose
- adoption of defence coping mechanisms

Systems Level (Work Environment)

- increasingly going by the book
- avoiding discussion of work with colleagues
- high absenteeism
- high staff turnover
- resistance to change
- continuously high stress level
- norm of constantly "giving to others"
- hierarchical staff interaction
- demands for perfection
- repetitive work activities
- minimal receptivity for sharing of worker grievances
- expectation of extra effort with minimal rewards
- no reinforcement for suggestions on improving morale
- lack of encouragement for professional self-care
- discouragement of mutual participation
- frequent policy changes
- policy changes with little relevance to problem priority
- minimal additional resources available for extra-effort tasks
- rigid role typing for workers
- pervasive "isms" eg sexism, ageism, racism etc
- emphasis on past successes
- constantly shifting ground rules for policy
- minimal emphasis on positive feedback
- unmanageable caseload levels
- lack of supervision
- no encouragement for training or professional growth
- lack of organisational support
- inadequate information flow
- poor morale and non-support
- distrust, competition and poor communication
- worsening of relations with the organisation

### Consequences

- adverse effect on helping process and quality of service delivery
- worker leaves the job
- increased absenteeism, sick leave, and drug abuse
- Agency fails to attract and hire qualified people to work there
- job satisfaction diminishes
- high staff turnover disrupts programme continuity
- clients are adversely affected by constant changes in primary care-givers
- difficulty in forward planning and co-ordination with the Agency
- low levels of performance and effectiveness
- Agency becomes dysfunctional and eventually shuts down

### C. STAGES OF BURNOUT

#### Healthy

1. Realism
2. Movement
3. Satisfaction
4. Commitment
5. Involvement

#### Unhealthy

- Enthusiasm
- Stagnation
- Frustration/Resentment
- Disillusionment
- Apathy/Withdrawal

### D. WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

1. Consciousness Raising – the first step in dealing with burnout concerns an awareness of what it is, and what effect it has on staff, clients and the organisation.
2. Identify the problem as being one of personal management, not the fault of the individual.
3. Crucial element in burnout is the structure of the work environment. The following 6 factors have been identified as most important in determining stress levels.
 

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Communication flow</li> <li>b) Decision making practices</li> <li>c) Style of Management</li> <li>d) Workload</li> <li>e) Organisational Climate</li> <li>f) Time Pressure</li> </ol>	These will be separately dealt with
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4. Establish service priorities and focus on these.
5. Utilise permanency planning as opposed to short term, ad hoc measures.

6. Agency Goals and Guiding Philosophy
  - make goals as clear and consistent as possible
  - develop a strong, distinctive guiding philosophy
  - review and evaluate these from one year to five years
  - share responsibility for care and treatment with the client, the client's family and the community.
  
7. Communication Flow
  - establish open and effective communication
  - utilise both formal and informal, written and verbal
  - communication should flow vertically as well as horizontally
  - demarcate clear lines of communication
  - people are informed of what is going on, ie no secrets
  - managers are receptive and encourage interaction
  - structures are not rigidly hierarchical.
  
8. Decision Making Practices
  - utilisation of group and organisational problem solving and conflict resolution
  - staff participate in decision making
  - practice is one of democracy rather than autocracy
  - if necessary provide training in conflict resolution and group problem solving for staff
  - decisions are made at levels of appropriate information
  - people feel included and recognised
  - those affected by the decision are consulted
  - create formal mechanisms for problem solving and maximise staff autonomy.
  
9. Style of Management
  - Managers are in touch with lower level staff and aware of their problems
  - Managers are supportive of their staff
  - leadership is characterised by utilising group process techniques which encourage interaction, group problem solving, mutual influence and organisational achievement
  - the manager is technically competent, supportive of group members and holds high performance goals
  - the manager is friendly and approachable, encourages team building and is helpful towards colleagues
  - the style of management is characterised by trust, co-operation and goodwill
  - the manager recognises and rewards the efforts of personnel.

10. Workload

- the number of clients for whom staff are responsible at any one time is limited
- establish service priorities rather than responding to crisis calls
- increase a sense of autonomy by reducing the amount of unnecessary regulations and paperwork
- organise service units into teams that share caseloads
- enable new staff to build up to a full workload gradually
- utilise time management techniques
- provide staff with professional and administrative support
- reduce the number of direct client contact hours.

11. Organisational Climate

- there is a concern and respect for people and an interest in their welfare
- there is a freedom felt by staff to talk to their manager due to mutual confidence and trust, rather than condescension and fear
- the interactive process is a supportive experience which builds and maintains a sense of people's worth
- co-worker relationships are warm, with favourable attitudes and trust towards each other – a high degree of group loyalty exists
- morale is high.

12. Time Pressure

- utilise time management and time study principles
- structure roles in ways which allow workers to take time out wherever necessary
- utilise ancillary personnel eg volunteers to provide other staff with opportunities for "tri outs"
- encourage workers to take frequent vacations, on short notice if necessary
- limit the number of hours that a staff person works
- encourage part-time and job sharing employment
- arrange every day so that the rewarding and unrewarding activities alternate.

13. Staff Development

- encourage staff to adopt realistic goals by utilising goal setting techniques
- adopt carefully designed job descriptions which can be reviewed at 6 monthly intervals
- orient new staff to the agency and provide a "buddy" to be available for that staff member
- rotate staff between direct services and administration/educational functions
- implement a career development programme and career that encourages advanced training and professional growth
- provide frequent opportunities for in-service training designed to increase role effectiveness and provide staff with input
- encourage the development of support groups amongst staff and/or work focused counselling/consultation to staff experiencing high levels of stress

- develop and utilise monitoring and feedback mechanisms sensitive to short term gains
- provide periodic “burnout checkups” which could be undertaken by all staff
- create management training and development programmes for current and potential supervisory personnel, emphasising those aspects of the role that administrators have the most difficulty with.

#### 14. Role Structure

- examine what roles the worker is involved in to ensure that there are clear boundaries between them and that role confusion is not occurring
- ensure that staff are involved in more than one role or programme in order to provide variety and allow for creativity
- allow staff members to be involved in creating new programmes and establishing their own role contribution to that programme
- monitor role strain in supervisory personnel and intervene when strain becomes excessive.

#### 15. Supervision

- provide regular and adequate supervision that addresses communication barriers, organisational game playing involving power, unclear expectations, lack of flexibility with the job structure, evaluation and inadequate or inappropriate training
- schedule regular supervisory sessions, both for administrative and personal supervision
- utilise a “buddy system” where two peers with similar responsibilities consult each other
- enable the supervisee to exercise some control of the balance of work responsibilities
- encourage peer supervision and support
- identify initial competencies and inadequacies, gradually adding more complex and demanding tasks as the staff member develops increasing knowledge, competence and skill
- utilise team supervision to enable the group to work through issues.

#### 16. Reward System

- reward workers upon successful performance of a task
- recognise efforts that workers are making
- institute an appropriate feedback and distribution system
- examine extrinsic rewards such as pay, annual reviews, fringe benefits, job security and promotional opportunities
- encourage intrinsic advantages such as appreciation, recognition and autonomy.